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ABSTRACT

The project described focuses on working towards improving the quality of curriculum, instruction and evaluation procedures in the New York City Police Department. The problems facing competency-based training programs are reviewed, as are the specific problems of the New York City program. Attempts to improve the present training procedure include: (1) planning facilities to allow simulated patrol routines for recruits; (2) providing counseling services to help recruits with communication skills and personal problems; (3) improving the training and supervising of field training officers; (4) providing selected field experiences; and, (5) upgrading the teaching skills of the instructors. The researches conclude that an ideal training program would best be served by a decentralized training facility. Continuing problems faced by the training program are briefly delineated. (Author/PC)

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PROGRAM DESIGN AND CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT FOR POLICE TRAINING

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The current trend in professional fields such as medicine, law and education toward competency or performance based training has affected police training as well. To a large extent, job related training and certification procedures in urban police departments have been prompted by pressures for greater minority employment, including women. One sees common responses in professional training programs to move in this direction. Performance based programs as differentiated from traditional programs, generally focus on one or more of the following aspects of training:

1. Detailed analysis of tasks involved in performance of the job.

2. Development of individualized or rate-based programs to stress exit criteria.

3. Provision of materials and experiences referred to as modules which closely interrelate theory and practice.

4. Use of criterion referenced measurement techniques in evaluation.

All elements may be found in programs but in no case do the elements imply a given content of value system. In this sense, performance based training is simply a structure for focusing on competence.

Some would argue that such programs tend to emphasize the absolute minimum of skills and knowledge necessary for performance - that accompanying attitudes, values and professional socialization, assumed to be part of training, are overlooked. This is certainly not a characteristic of the structure but may be found in some programs.

The problems of competency based programs are not new. Consider just one element of such a design for police training, that of providing a comprehensive list of skills and knowledge considered necessary for competent police performance? Even if such a list existed, agreement would be difficult. The wide range of tasks would necessarily only be sampled in training. Then the questions arise of who will select, and will the tasks be generalizable: all questions trainers and program designers have asked before.

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Programs Utilizing Elements of Performance Based Models

Most instructional programs for police training have been based on the assumption that officers will learn a great deal about the job during a probationary period. What then must a police officer know before the probationary period?

The training program in Washington, D.C., based on a systems or feedback approach, utilizes individual packages in which the recruit determines his own rate of progress. A relatively short average time period of 17 weeks appears adequate for officers to learn the required basics of street patrol. Six major groups of tasks for basic street patrol were identified: scout car operation, patrol techniques, arrest and detention, interviewing, weapons and self defense. Recruits practice some exercises with a partner, others are completed alone; some are recorded on tape and film and can be self-evaluated. It appears that the program is efficient for training in basic street patrol, and greater depth and sophistication are provided in the supervised field experiences.

In contrast the training program for London police consists of an intensive 17 week period (officers must live at the training facility) with a continuing probationary period of one year and 8 months, alternating field experiences and specialized training courses at regional centers. Field assignments during this two-year period are closely related to the intensive workshops and courses in a deliberate attempt to integrate theory and practice.

In the case of New York City, where the number of officers in training may reach 3000 a year, neither a management system nor facilities exist to provide an individualized program as in Washington or the two-year program in London. However, the program has recently moved in the direction of stressing job related competencies.

The collaborative project with the New York Police Academy, described in this paper, focused on working towards improving the quality of curriculum, instructional and evaluation procedures. For example, the academy recently received state accreditation from the department of education, each recruit successfully completing the program receives 35 college credits.

Review of Curriculum and Instruction

In our initial assessment of the program, we found a dependence on lectures as a primary source of information for recruits and exclusive use of paper-pencil examinations for academic areas. As a police officer's work is highly dependent on interpersonal skills and decision making strategies, lectures and multiple choice questions seemed limiting. There was little or no reading material in social sciences nor did the basic undergraduate college courses available in psychology and sociology seem adequate in providing crucial skills related knowledge.

The introduction of social science as a major component of the academy curriculum was intended to promote the following specific objectives: knowledge of social and ethnic groups in the community, inter-personal skills, understanding of police role functions, stress and role identification. Job related material, although crucial, was not overly abundant, at least written at a reading level which could be handled easily by the recruit. A large part of the recruit reading material developed was written and/or adapted by police officers with academic preparation in the fields of psychology and sociology, in consultation with our project staff and others. All material was selected for its direct application to police competencies.

Critics of police performance in large urban areas say programs have neglected teaching social science topics. Community service and helping functions have been part of police work and training since the early nineteenth century. The criticism is focused on the extent to which police are social change agents. Although the police obviously use skills and understandings of the allied helping professions, it does not share therapeutic functions of these professions. The relevance of social science, however, to police performance is great.

With this in mind the New York Academy tried to emphasize the contributions of social science in the context of providing improved police service.

Physical training, police science and the law curriculum also underwent major revision to eliminate non-job related material and exercises. All material was reformulated and written with a common format for the recruit syllabus. Instructional objectives were delineated for each topic, pre-assessment measures were given for the recruit to answer before reading the material, terms and concepts were defined, and post evaluation questions to be answered by the recruit or discussed in class were elements of the instructional format.

One of the problems faced after the introduction of social science was that of providing adequate instruction. Although civilians frequently do not have credibility as instructors for police training, it is also difficult to find a sufficient number of police officers with expertise in the social sciences. A major effort was taken to search out all officers with such a background; however, it is clear that the faculty in this area still need training in small group techniques, and in many areas of the curriculum.

A problem faced by all officers that come to teach, is the lack of teaching skills. It has been suggested that the instructors have a continuing program, to improve their teaching skills, as well as up-date the academic preparation in their field of expertise. There should be continuing rigorous evaluation of the instructional staff to insure a high level of performance.

Another major problem faced by the academy with the introduction of large amounts of reading materials was the general level of communication skills of the recruit. The CUNY project initiated the construction and evaluation of a job-related reading test.[1] One hundred and thirty terms commonly found in law enforcement materials and eight reading comprehension items based on passages taken from law, police science and social science curricula were used. In the evaluation, this test appears to be a better predictor of success at the academy than either the group intelligence test or general reading test given previously. It is hoped that the test can be used in the future for identifying recruits that need help in reading and writing skills prior to entering training. This is crucial for purposes of upgrading the general level of competency as well as providing the necessary skills used in interviewing, record keeping, and court appearances.

1. Police Recruit Reading Test. Police Training Project Urban Analysis Center, City University of New York, 33 West 42nd Street, New York, N. Y.

Evaluation of Instruction and the Curriculum

From the evaluation of the current program it appears that probationary officers do not always see the relevance of some activities and materials. Although film episodes, simulated and role playing experiences are seen as more helpful than lectures, recruits and officers feel the field will be the only place of knowledge. A frequent remark of recruits is that "each situation out there will be unique - nothing can be learned from second-hand (Academy) experience." Actually, it is common to hear this from any novice - it places greater responsibility on the instructor at the Academy to show the importance and applicability in each situation.

Also, there is some evidence that a highly sophisticated initial training program may neglect or sleight rather routine day-to-day operations of street patrol. Probationary officers we questioned felt inadequate in such areas as using the radio, filling in forms and reports, in knowledge of the geography and community services of the city. Initially the officer should feel fully prepared and competent in routine street patrol procedures so he can more fully attend to the more unusual aspects of the situation at hand.

Another difficult problem arises if training ignores certain street tactics and teaches instead procedures which the probationary officer often finds unrealistic. For example, officers we interviewed were all given standard stop-and-frisk methods at the academy. When on the street, supervisory officers told them it would be necessary to use other tactics. This totally discredited the training they had received. Not only should the supervising officer be informed of what the recruit has learned but the Academy should not imply that the method taught is the only way. There should be greater congruence in teaching and practice - either the tactics on the street should be modified or training procedures revised. Now there is simply a credibility gap.

Work in Progress

The Academy has begun to address itself to the problems mentioned above.

1. Facilities are being planned to allow simulated patrol routines to be practiced by the recruit. For example, radio earphones have been installed which take calls from the local station house. Plans are underway to provide video feedback of the recruit on his performance in interviewing skills, handling domestic disputes, search and frisk, and other techniques.

2. The counseling services now provided attempt to help recruits with communication skills as well as personal problems.

3. An intensive program for training and supervising the field training officers is now underway.

4. Selected field experiences, visiting courts, prisons, and various communities of the city are now part of the regular program.

5. Attempts to upgrade the teaching skills of the instructors are being taken. Certainly, there must be greater interchange between the Academy and the local colleges and universities to provide the training for the instructors.

Conclusions

An ideal training program might best be served by some decentralized training facilities. Assuming basic training can most effectively be done at a central location, field experiences and intensive short courses devoted to problems of the field assignment, might be seen as more relevant by the officer and more meaningful. There should be more attention given to the continuing education of the officer after initial training. Although this would be very difficult given the number of officers in training and the size of New York City, the integration of theory and practice will most likely be handled in a decentralized training program.

Some of the continuing problems appear to be:

1. Identification of the necessary skills and knowledge needed before the initial field assignment.

2. Determination of techniques to provide information largely perceived as theoretical and irrelevant to recruits in what is essentially a practitioners field.

3. Determination of the appropriate balance in a program between academic training and associated field experiences.

4. Determination of the general and the specialized skills needed by an urban police officer.

5. Provision for training the police officer for greater awareness and insight into the pressures and stresses of the job before he meets the full force of the system. Where or what is an appropriate buffer experience?

6. Provision of more job-related evaluation procedures. Although success at the Academy on objective tests appears to be highly related to future success as measured by promotions, it must be remembered that promotions are largely earned by passing similar paper-pencil tests. Are these tests in fact related to on-the-job performance? If not, what are the assessment procedures necessary?

7. Determination of those instructional roles in the training system which could best be served by civilians and to determine the ways in which the system can reach out to the academic and community resources.

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